1:Du Bois E-5 (1938-1939) 1944
OF5 Alor OF5

Chapter 2

The Setting

131 ALOR is a small and obscure island in the Netherlands East Indies. It lies directly north of central Timor at the end of that long string of land fragments called the Lesser Sundas. More specifically, it is 8 degrees south of the equator and between 124 degrees and 125 degrees longitude east of Greenwich. This places it about halfway between Java and New Guinea in an east-west line and about halfway between Australia and Celebes in a north-south line.

132 Alor's climate and vegetation reflect its proximity to the Australian land mass. There are prevailing southeast and northwest winds, with severe monsoon storms as the winds change. The wet season begins with a few thunder showers at the end of October, then works up to a crescendo in January, February, and March, when rains fall in a steady downpour each afternoon, sending spates rushing down the deeply
221 gouged river canyons. This is the period of planting and intensive weeding.

[132] With the gradual cessation of the rains the temperature falls slightly, and as the rainy season ends, first corn, then rice and beans are harvested. Later still comes the sweet potato season. By the end of the dry season the whole countryside is brown and parched, and finally many of the springs and small rivers dry up. The only important crop of this period is cassava. At this time natives burn over the land to destroy the weeds they have been cutting in their fields and to drive wild pig for communal hunts. Little survives the annual burning-over except eucalyptus trees and a kind of bladv grass known throughout the Indies as
● 137 alang alang.

Alor is therefore not lush jungle country. Rich tropical growth is found only in the ravines where there is moisture the year round and where the land is too steep for cultivation—and to natives, land too steep for cultivation means nothing short of the perpendicular.

133 The terrain is so precipitous that one drops easily into accepting it
134 as an explanation for the remarkable diversity of language and culture on this small island. Alor is only about fifty miles long and thirty wide, but it supports a native population of approximately seventy thousand,
[117] who speak innumerable dialects of at least eight different languages.
101 Abui is the name given the language of the area from which most of the subsequent descriptive data were drawn. It is fifty miles from the